

# AN OUTSIDER'S GUIDE TO PUBLIC ORAL HISTORY IN NEW ZEALAND.

Nēpia Mahuika.

At the beginning of this century, public history in New Zealand was considered a 'new term' in historical practice, described as crucial in both 'the emergence of professional history writing' and the assertion of 'cultural nationalism.'<sup>1</sup> In the past decade, scholars here have highlighted its breadth and significance in 'the employment of historians and the historical method outside academia; in government, private companies, the media, historical societies and museums, as well as those working in private practice.'<sup>2</sup> Oral history has also become a significant part of public history's nation-making, key in the collecting of exceptional and 'ordinary' public voices.<sup>3</sup> For Māori, current definitions of oral and public history are problematic because, as this essay suggests, both are constructed within Pākehā-centric perspectives of history, tradition, orality and what counts as 'public.' Public history has been called a 'slippery process', often shaped in a contrast between 'people's history' and a 'search for social cohesion'.<sup>4</sup> This search for 'cohesion' is a familiar colonial refrain that fuels a healthy native scepticism of public history as yet another settler-centric invention that keeps us on the outside. This essay considers the ways in which public oral history in New Zealand is articulated, noting how this is done within narrow definitions and binaries that displace, ignore, or distort, indigenous perspectives. It suggests a rethinking of oral history as a movement beyond current binaries in the field, and advocates a widening of the meaning of oral sources, methods and politics, in order to include indigenous definitions as legitimately oral and public. This analysis is decolonial, not because it seeks an eradication of nationalism, but because it seeks to disrupt colonial-centric

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<sup>1</sup> Bronwyn Dalley and Jock Phillips, 'Introduction', in *Going Public: The Changing Face of New Zealand History*, ed. by Bronwyn Dalley and Jock Phillips, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001), pp. 9, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Giselle Byrnes and Mark Smith, 'Introduction', *New Zealand Journal of Public History*, 1, 1 (2011), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Rebecca Sharpless writes that the aim for many oral historians has been to obtain 'a fuller record of the past': to document particularly the 'lives of ordinary people.' Rebecca Sharpless, 'The History of Oral History', in *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology*, ed. by Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Meyers, and Rebecca Sharpless (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), pp. 21, 24; Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past, Popular uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> *Oral History and Public Memories*, ed. by Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), p. xiv. I draw on Graham Smith's use of the phrase 'public oral history', which he argues encapsulates a very broad array of oral history work produced and presented for, by, and to, various 'publics'. Graham Smith, 'Toward a Public Oral History', in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. by Donald Ritchie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 432 -33.

meanings of oral and public history by recentering Māori perspectives as legitimate to the New Zealand public oral history vernacular.

## A 'PUBLIC' ORAL HISTORY FOR WHOM?

In the teaching of oral history 'essentials' in New Zealand, mainstream practitioners have focused predominantly on interviewing and oral recordings.<sup>5</sup> This emphasis is consistent with international descriptions that style oral history as 'generally' a biographical life narrative approach.<sup>6</sup> Consistently, popular guides and handbooks explain oral history as a methodology shaped in co-constructed recordings between listeners and narrators. In Aotearoa, Megan Hutching writes that oral history 'may better be defined as a method of gathering evidence', while in contrast oral traditions are 'another category of oral evidence' different in that they deal with recollections 'beyond the lifetime of living informants.'<sup>7</sup> This differentiation is significant in its 'other'-ing of native historical knowledge, a more recent contribution to a colonial legacy that has displaced Māori perceptions of history, reducing them to less reliable myths, superstitions, and traditions.<sup>8</sup> Further compounding this issue is a 'binary model' that Anna Green has argued maintains a problematic division between supposedly irreconcilable 'Māori oral narratives and Pākehā written texts.'<sup>9</sup> For public oral history in Aotearoa, these tensions perpetuate conflicting

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<sup>5</sup> The 'essentials' of oral history are taught in courses and workshops throughout the country, and are considered an important requirement by the Ministry of Culture and Heritage in the awarding of oral history funding for local community projects. Advertised this year as 'The Essentials of Oral History Research, Auckland Workshop, 18 March 2017'. <<http://www.oralhistory.org.nz/?s=essentials>>. Accessed 10 April 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Trevor Lummis, *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence* (London: Hutchinson Education, 1987), pp. 21-24.

<sup>7</sup> Megan Hutching, *Talking History: A Short Guide to Oral History* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books; Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1993), pp. 1, 2. Judith Fyfe and Hugo Manson also describe oral history as 'a record of information in oral form' that is the 'result of a planned interview.' Judith Fyfe and Hugo Manson, *Oral History and How to Approach it* (Wellington: New Zealand Oral History Archive, 1989), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Nēpia Mahuika, 'The Indigenous 'Truth' of Oral History: Decolonizing Oral History in Presence, Practice, and Politics', *Our Histories, Our Way: Indigenous Oral History*. Perth, Australia. 5 May 2016. Keynote.

<sup>9</sup> *Remembering, Writing Oral History*, ed. by Anna Green and Megan Hutching, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2004), p. 4. Green and Hutching are referring to Judith Binney, 'Māori Oral Narratives, Pākehā Written Texts: Two Forms of Telling History', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 21, 1 (1987), pp. 16-28.

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epistemological differences that fail to account for the dynamic interactions between the text and voice, cultural negotiation, and the sophisticated ways in which oral history is nuanced in local contexts. Alessandro Portelli writes that ‘orality and writing are forever changing roles, functions, and meanings in a mutual relationship of seeking and desire rather than exclusions and polarisations.’<sup>10</sup> In many indigenous communities, for instance, textual adaptations are still considered oral histories, not because they are viewed as explicitly oral, but because they are believed to retain the essence of ‘kōrero tuku iho’ (words passed down) so long as the writer has sufficient ability.<sup>11</sup>

A rethinking of the field here is perhaps first and foremost premised on the truth that oral history in New Zealand has always been more than contemporary interview recordings. Māori taught oral histories in ‘traditional’ schools of learning, where specific oral techniques like the use of waha kohatu (a stone placed in the mouth) were used to ‘aid’ memory and ‘prevent stammering.’<sup>12</sup> Māori were our first oral historians, and their techniques, sources, and practices were varied. ‘Nineteenth century observers’, according to Jane McRae, ‘remarked on the frequent and impressive oratory’ they witnessed in tribal communities.<sup>13</sup> More than merely traditions, indigenous oral histories were past narratives, multisensory, and worked as valid forms of history. Dismissing Māori oral history as tradition is a significant act of colonial power and oppression. This has been a concern for native peoples around the world who, as Julie Cruickshank pointed out some time ago now, have increasingly demanded that their oral accounts be taken seriously as ‘legitimate perspectives on history.’<sup>14</sup> In rethinking the parameters of oral history in New Zealand, then, scholars should revisit the embedded definitions of oral history and tradition that have been imposed on indigenous peoples by colonisers.

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<sup>10</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Text and the Voice, Writing, Speaking, and Democracy in American Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. xiv.

<sup>11</sup> Nēpia Mahuika, ‘Kōrero Tuku Iho’: Reconfiguring Oral History and Oral Tradition’ (unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Waikato, 2012), p. 159.

<sup>12</sup> Mita Carter, ‘The Preservation of the Māori Oral Tradition’, *Oral History in New Zealand*, 3 (1990-91), p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Jane McRae, *Māori Oral Tradition, He Kōrero no Te Ao Tawhito* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2017), p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Julie Cruickshank, ‘Notes and Comments: Oral Tradition and Oral History: Reviewing Some Issues’, *Canadian Historical Review*, 75, 3 (1994), p. 403.

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In New Zealand, Māori perspectives offer a redefining of oral history that is more indicative of a broader public experience.<sup>15</sup> A more comprehensive definition requires an understanding of how Māori conceive of oral sources and methods. Beyond audio recorded interviews, and of particular relevance to public historians, is a rich archive of mnemonic devices and practices that have long been connected to New Zealand oral history. These include whakairo (carvings), kakahu (clothing), and rāranga (weaving), which feature prominently in oral performance such as haka (dance), waiata (songs), wānanga (collective oral discussions) and whaikōrero (formal speeches).<sup>16</sup> Oral history in Aotearoa, much more than interview methods, is an evolving creative and widely publicised practice, performed in multiple ways and spaces on a daily basis. Public oral history that takes notice of this expansive living archive must necessarily widen its own view of what is a richly textured orality in this country.

Oral history was a native public practice well before the advent of audio recording equipment, the arrival of British colonists, and the imposing of western historical methodologies. Māori oral history was our first public history, kept in a legacy that predates nineteenth-century Māori Land Court records and the early twentieth-century work of researchers such as James Cowan.<sup>17</sup> New Zealand oral history was not established by Pākehā journalists and interviewers, but by Māori orators, singers, artists, and communities.<sup>18</sup> Recent narratives that

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<sup>15</sup> For some, Māori oral histories are better defined within indigenous frameworks than in the colonial articulations that frame them as traditions rather than credible histories. Nēpia Mahuika, 'The Gift of Memory: Oral History as a Treasure and Responsibility', National Oral History Association of New Zealand Conference. Wellington, New Zealand. 20 September 2014. Keynote.

<sup>16</sup> For some examples here see Danny Keenan, 'The Past from the Paepae: Uses of the Past in Māori Oral History', *Oral History in New Zealand*, 12, 13 (2000-2001), pp. 33-38; Mere Whaanga 'Telling our Stories: Hapu Identity in Waiata, Pakiwaitara and Visual Arts', in *Māori and Oral History: A Collection*, ed. by Rachel Selby and Alison J. Laurie (Wellington: National Oral History Association of New Zealand, 2005), pp. 23-27. Nēpia Mahuika, "Kōrero Tuku Iho", pp. 152-188.

<sup>17</sup> Cowan is said to have 'sometimes rejected Pākehā writing in the light of Māori oral accounts, or declared that a Māori oral testimony was more accurate than European ones.' He is considered one of the pioneering oral historians in New Zealand. Chris Hilliard, 'James Cowan and the Frontiers of New Zealand History', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 31, 1 (1997), p. 222.

<sup>18</sup> The New Zealand Oral History Archive was founded by Judith Fyfe and Hugo Manson, for instance, while in 2016 the National Oral History Association of New Zealand celebrated its 30th anniversary acknowledging the work of its founders, Judith Fyfe, Hugo Manson, Claudia Orange, Jock Phillips and Beverley Morris. National Oral History Association of New Zealand,

claim the origins of oral history as a mid to late twentieth-century phenomenon in New Zealand are severely blinkered.<sup>19</sup> How can oral history in this country serve public history if it operates within a timeframe that overlooks centuries of indigenous experiences? A more accurate defining of public oral history in New Zealand, then, requires the inclusion of these deep histories in a rethinking that collapses more fully the differences between tradition and history, and includes Māori as their own distinctive ‘founding’ public community complete with a valid history of oral transmission. These elisions and binary essentialisms reflect layers beneath a flawed Pākehā-centric articulation of public oral history. In New Zealand, oral history definitions have been complicated by existing tensions between amateur and academic perspectives of the field. Thus, while public oral history in Aotearoa is in need of a drastic decolonial overhaul, it is difficult to see how this can occur until practitioners embrace a more critically ‘interpretive’ mode.<sup>20</sup>

### BEYOND SHAKESPEARE & ROCK’N’ROLL

For some time, oral historians in New Zealand have been hindered by an unhelpful antagonism between supposed academic and amateur approaches to the field. This is nothing new for public historians, who have likewise grappled uneasily with the term public history as it has been ‘defined in the negative by its perceived opposite — academic history.’<sup>21</sup> When I attended my first national oral history conference over a decade ago, leading speakers described what they did in a binary between dreary academic ‘Shakespearean’ practice and a more

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*Tell Me More: Sharing Our Histories* (Conference Programme) (Christchurch: National Oral History Association of New Zealand, 2016) p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> While an oral history ‘founders’ project in New Zealand pays homage to those who established the archives and the National Oral History Association, oral historians should not forget that oral history existed before this, and was seen as encompassing more extensive sources and practices than the narrow focus on interviews and recordings that practitioners use today.

<sup>20</sup> The ‘reconstructive mode’ of oral history, according to Michael Roper, occurs when researchers undertake interviews with little thought given to a deeper interpretive process. The collecting and depositing of interviews into archives for later analysis is then ‘reconstructive’ and lacking a deeper interpretive appreciation for the potential of oral sources and methods. In contrast, the interpretive mode requires greater attention given to the impact of methods and interpretive theories employed by oral historians. Michael Roper, ‘Oral History’, in *The Contemporary History Handbook*, ed. by Brian Brivati, Julia Buxton, and Anthony Seldon (Manchester: St Martin’s Press, 1996), p. 346.

<sup>21</sup> Dalley and Phillips, ‘Introduction’, p. 17.

attractive and preferable ‘rock’n’roll’ oral history.<sup>22</sup> ‘Shakespearean’ oral history was considered over-theorised, boring, and bogged down in interpretative analysis, while ‘rock’n’roll’ oral history was the fun stuff, focused more on the doing and collecting of recordings. This aversion to academic interpretive theories has contributed to an oral history approach in New Zealand which is sometimes unaware of its own ‘reconstructive’ romanticism. The implications for a public oral history approach inattentive to interpretive theories of narrative, power, subjectivity and memory, are significant. Linda Shopes has reminded oral historians that ‘public memories are often shaped by complicated power struggles’ where questions should be asked about ‘who gets to say what about a given community.’<sup>23</sup> An un-theorised oral history practice would be a step back to an era before ‘socially engaged historians’, who considered public and oral history a service designed ‘to help people write, create, and understand their own history’ or give voice to the previously marginalised or silenced.<sup>24</sup> Public history has been described by some as a movement that promotes a ‘collaborative’ practice of history that provides ‘special insights accessible and useful to the public’ — an approach aimed at a non-specialist audience.<sup>25</sup> Oral history in political articulation has been described as a ‘democratic tool’, predicated on the belief that democracy is ultimately the key to liberating and amplifying the silenced.<sup>26</sup> But how can public oral history in Aotearoa give voice to the voiceless, ‘democratise’ and provide collaborative ‘insights’, if it shuns academic interpretive research, others Māori oral history, or assumes its democratic politics is a universal ‘public’ aspiration?

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<sup>22</sup> Judith Fyfe and Hugo Manson, ‘Historically Speaking’: Twenty Years of Oral History in Aotearoa New Zealand’, in *Looking Backwards, Moving Forward – The Past and Future of Oral History in New Zealand*, National Oral History Association of New Zealand. National Library, Wellington. 28-29 July 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Hamilton and Shopes, *Oral History and Public Memories*, p. xv.

<sup>24</sup> Ronald J. Grele, ‘Whose Public? Whose History? What is the Goal of a Public Historian?’, *The Public Historian*, 3, 1 (1981), p. 46.

<sup>25</sup> Cathy Stanton, ‘What is Public History?’ Redux’, *Public History News*, 27, 4 (September 2007), p. 1; Byrnes and Smith, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Power and Democracy: The Many Voices of Oral History, International Oral History Association, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain. 9-12 July 2014. In the call for papers, the organisers described oral history as a democratic tool: ‘As a democratic tool, oral history records and preserves the memories, perceptions, and voices of individuals and groups at all levels and in all endeavors.’ See *Power and Democracy: The Many Voices of Oral History* <<https://2014iohacongress.wordpress.com>>. [accessed 19 April 2016].

Public oral history in Aotearoa is so much more than Shakespeare and rock'n'roll. Oral historians who ignore important academic contributions risk being left behind in their own discipline, and by public historians too who see their practice aligned with rigorous academic 'conventions' in research, knowledge of the literature, and key interpretive methodological discussions.<sup>27</sup> Apathy toward academic oral history here inevitably stirs no challenge to colonial norms, especially when it resists its moral responsibilities to engage the New Zealand public in meaningful decolonial conscientization. Tribunal histories, for instance, require a decolonising of the archive, as Rachel Buchanan points out, that acknowledge the transfer of oral histories from private iwi worlds to government-funded public domains.<sup>28</sup> Here, coloniser desires, as Miranda Johnson suggests, are frustrated when 'dangerous' indigenous oral histories 'cannot be assimilated into the methodological and political norms of the tribunal and the historical profession.'<sup>29</sup> What is perceived as 'public', then, is 'pulled apart' by claimants who refuse to allow their oral histories to be publicised in democratic reconciliatory discourses premised on 'toleration', models of dialogue, and 'claims of justice that are offered only to be withdrawn.'<sup>30</sup> Thus, Māori oral histories, testimonies collected in Tribunal reports and claims research, and Land Court Minute Books, are not supplementary to 'public' democratic history or open to just anyone in the public domain. Indigenous scholars have long asserted that their histories — especially in the public domain — are not freely available 'without permission' but require relationships built on trust, long-term commitment, and apprenticeship.<sup>31</sup> This is not Shakespeare or rock'n'roll, but an appreciation of New Zealand's distinctive oral history landscape grounded in a specific historical relationship between Māori and Pākehā. Historians attuned and committed to this partnership in Aotearoa, might consider more closely the implications for public oral history practice, and how this might be better defined beyond unproblematised assimilative amateurism or academic

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<sup>27</sup> Dalley and Phillips, 'Introduction', p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> Rachel Buchanan, 'Decolonizing the Archives: The Work of New Zealand's Waitangi Tribunal', *Public History Review*, 14 (2007), p. 46.

<sup>29</sup> Miranda Johnson, 'Honest Acts and Dangerous Supplements: Indigenous Oral History and Historical Practice in Settler Societies', *Postcolonial Studies*, 8, 3 (2005), p. 273.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Winona Wheeler, 'Reflections on the Social Relations of Indigenous Oral Histories', in *Walking a Tightrope: Aboriginal People and their Representation*, ed. by Ute Lischke and David T. McNab (Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2005), p. 203.

democratic impulses that ironically serve the same colonial master. Recently, for instance, the National Oral History Association of New Zealand discussed the need to update its ethical code to include indigenous perspectives. These ethical obligations articulate consent with an acknowledgement of tribal guardianship and *te reo Māori*, and require an engagement with the growing literature in *iwi* and indigenous scholarship that define oral history in New Zealand in explicitly Māori ways.<sup>32</sup> While an engagement with ‘academic’ oral history is a part of this process, it is important to note that indigenous perspectives of oral history are not aligned with global academic definitions. Cree historian Winona Wheeler has emphasised this disparity in North America, where academic definitions of oral history as ‘planned tape recorded interviews’ are diametrically opposed to ‘how most Indigenous peoples relate to recorded voices.’<sup>33</sup> Rethinking public oral history in New Zealand requires a move beyond a Shakespeare and rock’n’roll binary that is not only outdated, but unconsciously colonial-centric in its assumptions about the purpose, politics, and practice of oral history in Aotearoa. It also requires a careful reassessment of how historians define oral sources and oral history methods that include rather than marginalise Māori articulations regarding the form, politics and practice of oral history.

### ESCAPING THE CONFINES OF FORM AND METHOD

Scholars in New Zealand and abroad have perpetuated limited views regarding the sources and archives they promote as typical to oral history. In a practice driven by life history interviews, oral recordings serve as *the* definitive source, often with little regard for other oral forms. International commentators have argued that it is the orality of the sources that makes oral history different. Alessandro Portelli, for instance, writes that ‘in the search for a distinguishing factor we must turn in the first place to the form’ which is ‘distinctively oral despite the use of transcriptions.’<sup>34</sup> Conversely, some indigenous peoples

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<sup>32</sup> Māori and indigenous peoples have been writing about issues of guardianship, history, and oral history for some time. See for instance, Rachel Selby, ‘Still Being Punished: Corporal Punishments Lifelong Effects’, in *Māori and Oral History: A Collection*, ed. by Rachel Selby and Alison J. Laurie (Wellington: National Oral History Association of New Zealand, 2005), pp. 74-77; Alice Te Punga Somerville, Daniel Heath Justice and Noelani Arista’s special journal edition: *Biography*, 39, 3 (2016).

<sup>33</sup> Wheeler, ‘Reflections on the Social Relations of Indigenous Oral Histories’, pp. 194-195.

<sup>34</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 47.



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consider orality more fluidly, where the form includes an interconnected oral, visual, and textual world, inextricably connected to living rituals, carvings, whakapapa books, and environments rich with mnemonic multi-sensory sources.<sup>35</sup> Māori oral history has been thought of as not merely ‘first-hand’ digitally recorded encounters limited to the lifetimes of informants, but as ‘kōrero tuku iho’ (stories handed down) transmitted across generations in highly developed art-forms and practices.<sup>36</sup> Frequently, oral history accounts are found in written records, referred to by some as oral ‘texts’ or ‘literatures’, and by others as oral traditions or ‘standardised oral forms.’<sup>37</sup> A wider appreciation of what counts as an oral source bridges the divide between oral historians and traditionalists who engage with orality but tend to accentuate their differences more than their similarities. These divergences are often ambiguous and frail, and tend to overlook the shared interests both sets of scholars have in memory, history, and narrative. Storytelling is one of the key intersections that also has resonance for indigenous peoples. For many native communities, storytelling is often a key feature in the orality of oral sources, driven by narrators and listeners implicated in the co-composition of memory in variously innovative ways.<sup>38</sup> These ‘sources’ or wellsprings of oral history are very regular public occurrences in New Zealand, and are dynamic performances of history expressed on marae, at schools, in national performing arts festivals, weddings, birthdays, and tribal and familial gatherings. Sometimes they are captured by television or private devices, but often they are experienced and passed on via osmosis, enhanced by regular and repetitive transmissions. Oral history, according to many Māori, is sung, performed, heard, learnt in ‘osmosis’, and as Derek Lardelli points out, is transmitted in ‘the art of speech making’ that has been passed down from

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<sup>35</sup> Nēpia Mahuika, ‘Out of Sight, Out of Mind? The Significance of our Surroundings’, *Oral History in New Zealand*, 21 (2009), pp. 12-17.

<sup>36</sup> Bradford Haami, *He Putea Whakairo: Māori and the Written Word* (Wellington: Huia, 2004), p.15. Nēpia Mahuika, ‘Kōrero Tuku Iho’.

<sup>37</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Text and The Voice*; Jack Goody, *The Power of Written Tradition* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000); Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy, the Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982).

<sup>38</sup> This co-composition of narrative history is not only distinctive to Māori, but as Julie Cruickshank has observed, is normative in other native communities. She writes that ‘narrators who make sense of apparent archaic imagery are utilizing a traditional dimension of cultural life’, and ‘that storytelling is central to their intellectual tradition.’ Julie Cruickshank, ‘Myths as a Framework for Life Stories’, in *The Myths We Live By*, ed. by Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 174.

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generation to generation.<sup>39</sup> In my tribe, the orality of oral histories and traditions are not lost in writing and print, but enhanced by it.<sup>40</sup> Oral historians here might yet take more notice of living oral occasions and broader oral evidence as valid sources and expressions of oral history in Aotearoa. Tribunal oral histories, for instance, include ‘living’ oral evidence where researchers not only deal ‘with a dry record’ but with intergenerational witnesses who speak in a collapsed sense of time, past and present.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, tribal compositions, as Ruka Broughton has asserted, ‘remained unaltered’ and contained ‘much that can be regarded as factual material, whether biographical, historical, [or] genealogical.’<sup>42</sup> In the Native Land Courts, as Ann Parsonson has explained, what was left out of the transcriptions was often strategically significant.<sup>43</sup> These forms of oral history in New Zealand are diverse, complex, flawed and fluid constructions negotiated in communities that have their own definitions about what constitutes the form of oral history. Local perspectives that see oral history as more than interviews struggle to align with powerfully positioned national expectations. The New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage, for instance, funds community oral history projects only if they are based on ‘the recording and abstracting of oral history interviews.’<sup>44</sup> Oral history workshops run regularly throughout the

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<sup>39</sup> According to Herewini Parata, ‘they [the old people] sung mōteatea and the whakapapa’. You learnt, as he and Marena Collins argue, by osmosis. Oral history interview with Herewini Parata, 26 January 2008. Interviewed by Nēpia Mahuika 28.08 – 28.30. Recording held by interviewer. Oral history interview with Marena Collins and Tiawhe Musson, 10 July 2008. Interviewed by Nēpia Mahuika, Rec Two, 25.50 – 26.07. Recording held by interviewer. Oral history interview with Derek Lardelli, 18 December 2007. Interviewed by Nēpia Mahuika 18.09 – 18.49. Recording held by interviewer.

<sup>40</sup> Nēpia Mahuika, “Kōrero Tuku Iho”, p. 166.

<sup>41</sup> Johnson, ‘Honest Acts and Dangerous Supplements’, pp. 264-265.

<sup>42</sup> Broughton wrote that ‘conflicting opinions and dissension [in Māori oral tradition] do not necessarily blur the truth, rather it isolates the truth.’ Ruka Broughton, ‘Ko Ngaa Paiaka o Ngaa Rauru Kīitahi/The Origins of Ngaa Rauru Kīitahi’, (unpublished MA thesis: University of Victoria, 1979), pp. 5, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Ann Parsonson, ‘Stories for the Land: Oral Narratives in the Māori Land Court’, in *Telling Stories: Indigenous History and Memory in Australia and New Zealand*, ed. by Bain Attwood and Fiona Magowan (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2001), pp. 29-40.

<sup>44</sup> Ministry for Culture and Heritage/Te Manatū Taonga, New Zealand, *Terms and Conditions of Applications for NZOH Awards*, <<http://www.mch.govt.nz/funding-nz-culture/ministry-grants-awards/new-zealand-oral-history-awards/terms%20and%20conditions>>. [accessed 8 April 2017].

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country are also locked into a narrow focus on interviews as the essential form of oral history in Aotearoa.<sup>45</sup>

A devout emphasis on interview recordings neglects a dynamic Aotearoa where the form of oral history is substantially more diverse. New Zealand oral histories are much more than simply sources to be heard, but are experiences to be had, found in multisensory interactions that open up oral history sources as sophisticated living forms. To understand the form of oral history it is important to unravel the multiple layers that lie beneath. These layers reflect the customs and protocols of communities, and collapse the divisions between oral and textual sources with an understanding that oral history occurs with significant use of mnemonic devices and aids. Widening our appreciation of oral sources makes it much clearer that the form and methods of oral history are inextricably intertwined. Where oral sources are inclusive of visual and multisensory dimensions, so too are oral history methods broader in scope than an emphasis on interview techniques.

While the orality of oral sources has been emphasised as key to what makes oral history different, interviewing has likewise become the defining method in oral history. Don Ritchie, for instance, argues that oral history is essentially based in interviews, and as such does not include recorded speeches, personal diaries, or ‘sound recordings that lack dialogue between interviewer and interviewee.’<sup>46</sup> The rigidity of this perception is so strong that, according to Trevor Lummis, oral history has loosely been referred to as ‘the life history method.’<sup>47</sup> In Aotearoa, Alison J. Laurie has pointed out that ‘not every recorded interview is an oral history, and that despite this some researchers still believe that what they are doing is oral history.’<sup>48</sup> Oral historians here have a long way to go before a more definitive and clear picture of oral history methodology emerges. Interviewing, while popular, is simply one of many methods used to get at oral history

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<sup>45</sup> Workshops conducted via the National Library, for instance in 2017 and in previous years, focus on ‘Recording Seriously’, whereby students are taught ‘interviewing techniques, and technical and legal issues.’ See <<http://www.oralhistory.org.nz/>>.

<sup>46</sup> Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 19.

<sup>47</sup> Trevor Lummis, *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence*, p. 25.

<sup>48</sup> Alison J. Laurie, ‘Manufacturing Silences: Not Every Recorded Interview is an Oral History’, in *Māori and Oral History: A Collection*, ed. by Rachel Selby and Alison J. Laurie (Wellington: National Oral History Association of New Zealand, 2005), p. 78.

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narratives. Those with sufficient language skills, connections, and cultural knowledge have been exploring other methods, noting new ways to engage in oral history practice and analysis. In a study of formulaic patterning in mōteatea (songs), for instance, Raukura Roa has argued that there is ‘compelling evidence of extensive use of formulaic themes, but also evidence of the use of formulaic structuring.’<sup>49</sup> An analysis of the oral dimensions of waiata is another methodology whereby researchers engage in, listen to and observe oral history beyond co-constructed interviews. Like Roa, other researchers have also sought out their own articulations of oral history practice. In Australia, Wangkumara and Muruwari scholar Lorina Barker writes about ‘hangin’ out’ as a method used in formal and informal settings that immerses the participants in local rituals.<sup>50</sup> In her articulation, ‘hangin’ out and yarnin’ centres the culture and community in observing and listening to people’s stories and memories.<sup>51</sup> Barker’s approach is similar to oral history research situations like wānanga in Aotearoa. Wānanga has been described as a common and culturally embedded methodology used by Māori researchers to gather, analyse and disseminate Māori oral history and knowledge.<sup>52</sup> A wānanga approach often invokes traditional pedagogical practices for the transmission of narratives, but has also been used with groups beyond just tribal settings. As a verb, wānanga is about engaging in ‘the process of sharing’ and reflection that leads to the ‘creation of new knowledge.’<sup>53</sup> For iwi, wānanga tend to draw on tribal protocols which are often oral and collective, and frequently include te reo Māori (language) in fluid group kōrero (storytelling) compositions. This is a specific kind of Aotearoa public oral history whose legitimacy has been overlooked. How can oral historians here speak of public oral history and overlook the significance of wānanga? Wānanga

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<sup>49</sup> Raukura Roa, ‘Formulaic Discourse Patterning in Mōteatea’, (unpublished PhD thesis: University of Waikato, 2008), p. 204.

<sup>50</sup> Barker refers to Kerith Power’s ‘deep hanging out’, and its common use by anthropologists to describe the process of cultural immersion centred on ‘the idea that you best absorb a culture by being there and doing it’, by hanging out with people, and participating in their ‘daily activities’; cited in Lorina Barker, ‘Hangin’ Out’ and ‘Yarnin’: Reflecting on the Experience of Collecting Oral Histories’, *History Australia*, 5, 1 (2008), p. 09.3.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 09.1-09.9.

<sup>52</sup> This approach is used by a wide array of Māori who run wānanga as sessions in which oral history is regularly a significant factor in the dissemination of local knowledge around land, water, genealogy, familial connections, tribal beliefs and ongoing community practices. Rangimarie Mahuika, ‘The Value of Oral History in a Kaupapa Māori Framework’, *Te Pouhere Kōrero, Māori History, Māori People*, 3 (2009), pp. 91-92.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Wānanga’, in *Voices from Te Eke Panuku*, Eke Panuku, Simultaneous Success trajectories, Eke Panuku resources. Online. See <<http://kep.org.nz/resources>>. [accessed 21 November 2017].

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is a distinctively native research methodology based on ‘an ancient process of learning that encompasses te reo and mātauranga Māori... [and] embodies a set of standards and values’.<sup>54</sup> Māori geographer, Naomi Simmonds, has noted how wānanga offers ‘important insights into the construction and production of knowledge and to understandings of subjectivity, space and place.’<sup>55</sup> As an oral history methodology, wānanga has adapted over time and is utilised in various ways now to maintain and disseminate historical knowledge.<sup>56</sup> In methodologies like wānanga, ‘hangin’ out’, and formulaic readings of mōteatea, indigenous oral historians are illustrating not only the depth of the oral history archive, but the breadth of methods beyond life narrative interviews.

Capturing and disseminating oral history is much more involved than merely the collecting of interviews. Being aware of how to read oral and visually dynamic worlds requires a multisensory approach — a ‘visceral’ methodology that caters ‘to the sensations, moods and ways of being that emerge from our sensory engagement with the material and discursive environments in which we live.’<sup>57</sup> This requires a widening of our lens in order to reveal new forms, and a willingness to explore how we might make use of these sources. Oral history testimonies collected for the Waitangi Tribunal, for instance, need more work, as Green and Hutching have suggested, in order to develop more ‘sophisticated interpretive methods.’<sup>58</sup> But how can this happen if public oral history in New Zealand fails to broaden its view beyond interviews and recordings? Expanding our vision of oral history is not simply a matter of adding new forms and methods alongside oral interviews, but needs a deeper rethinking of the politics of the discipline.

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<sup>54</sup> Waitangi Tribunal, *The Wānanga Capital Establishment Report* (Wellington: Legislation Direct, 1999), at 21.

<sup>55</sup> Naomi Simmonds, ‘Tū te turuturu nō Hine-te-iwaiwa: Mana Wahine Geographies of Birth in Aotearoa New Zealand’ (unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Waikato, 2014), p. 88.

<sup>56</sup> Rangimarie Mahuika, ‘This Oral History is Not a Democracy: We Talk, You Listen’, in *Power and Democracy: The Many Voices of Oral History*, Barcelona, Spain 9-12 July 2014.

<sup>57</sup> Robyn Longhurst, Lynda Johnston, and Elsie Ho, ‘A Visceral Approach: Cooking ‘at home’ with Migrant Women in Hamilton, New Zealand’, in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 34, 3 (2009), p. 334, cited in Nēpia Mahuika, ‘Out of Sight, Out of Mind?’, p. 13.

<sup>58</sup> The need for more sophisticated interpretive frameworks is noted by Green and Hutching, *Remembering, Writing Oral History*, p. 4.

## DECOLONISING THE POLITICS OF 'PUBLIC' ORAL HISTORY

Public history plays a crucial role in New Zealand memory-making, and works as a site of significant political power.<sup>59</sup> Graham Smith has observed that too frequently public history is 'the history of the powerful and the victorious.'<sup>60</sup> Smith suggests that oral historians who question this power potentially enable 'a corrective to existing accounts of the past.'<sup>61</sup> Memories can be 'used and abused in public representation', and for this reason tension between 'the public right to know and the individual's right to privacy is ever-present in oral history.'<sup>62</sup> Oral histories in Aotearoa belong to communities, and despite their residence in public archives are not necessarily available for just any public project or person to plunder. This idea of ownership is not merely a Māori concept, but a well-rehearsed indigenous assertion. 'To take a story and claim ownership without permission', as Winona Wheeler has stressed, 'is stealing.' 'Indigenous copyright systems', Wheeler writes, 'are built on trust, and breach of that trust constitutes theft.'<sup>63</sup> In New Zealand, Māori oral recordings and testimonies collected and held in public archives do not simply belong to the 'public.' This is a tikanga, which dictates that another iwi person is not able to just 'come along and talk about 'your' tribe in the same way it would be wrong for us to 'go there and talk' about them.'<sup>64</sup> The use of tribal oral history in public sources without some context and clarification from those to whom the knowledge belongs reflects poor research practice and potentially even worse research ethics.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Public oral history is, according to Smith, 'a political activity.' He writes that, according to Ludmilla Jordanova, public oral history "weaves moral discourses", creating or sustaining historical narratives and that these moral and political dimensions are inseparable.' Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London: Arnold, 2000), p. 137, as cited in Smith, 'Toward a Public Oral History', p. 430.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 431.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Alistair Thomson, 'Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral history', *The Journal of American History*, 85, 2 (1998), p. 581. Selma Thomas, 'Private Memory in a Public Space: Oral History and Museums' in *Oral History and Public Memories*, p. 99.

<sup>63</sup> Wheeler, 'Reflections on the Social Relations of Indigenous Oral Histories', p. 203.

<sup>64</sup> Oral history interview with Apirana Tūahae Mahuika, 7 July 2009. Interviewed by Nēpia Mahuika, Rec. 3, 8.30 – 9.40. Recording held by interviewer.

<sup>65</sup> Discussed more fully in Nēpia Mahuika, 'New Zealand History is Māori History: Tikanga as the Ethical Foundation of Historical Scholarship in Aotearoa New Zealand', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 49, 1 (2015), pp. 5-30.

What tikanga do public historians in Aotearoa have in place to ensure that oral histories kept in public archives are not exploited for public nation-making purposes? While oral historians proclaim a politics that democratises and gives voice to the silenced, indigenous peoples here might well ask: how are our voices amplified, and our political ambitions present, in these articulations of an oral history politics in New Zealand? For native peoples who struggle against national myths that prescribe collective memories of citizenship, democracy works as a destructive and controlling force rather than a liberating system.<sup>66</sup> The political purpose of oral history in these communities is not to democratise, but to decolonise, to disturb colonial discourse, and to account for our history and worldviews in ways that often disrupt myths of democracy rather than uphold them. Public oral history in Aotearoa New Zealand, then, rather than styling itself a democratic tool for nation-making, might better give voice to its own public by embracing a decolonial politics inclusive of Māori desires and articulations beyond the ghettos.<sup>67</sup>

### **RETHINKING PUBLIC ORAL HISTORY IN AOTEAROA**

This essay has argued that a nation-making emphasis in public oral history is an expression of power that has relegated Māori definitions and aspirations to a subordinate ‘outside’ position. Oral historians who serve a nation-making public history, then, should think carefully about the colonial implications their work has for indigenous peoples. A rethinking of oral history that includes Māori sources, methods, and politics better reflects an Aotearoa ‘public’ committed to not just an amplification of oppressed voices, but a unified decolonial emancipatory desire.<sup>68</sup> In doing this, oral historians should move beyond a

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<sup>66</sup> Nēpia Mahuika, ‘Decolonizing Democracy: Oral History as Power and Self-determination in Indigenous Communities’, in *Power and Democracy: The Many Voices of Oral History*, Barcelona, Spain. 11 July 2014.

<sup>67</sup> Māori oral histories were reduced to fantasy, myth, and tradition by early ethnographers, and have been further ‘othered’ in the twentieth century from definitions of oral history maintained by oral historians today. They are definitions that marginalise Māori oral history in favour of interview recordings and methods which neglect the vast array of oral history sources and approaches that exist beyond these very limited perceptions. Nēpia Mahuika, ‘The Indigenous ‘Truth’ of Oral History’.

<sup>68</sup> Rangimarie Mahuika has argued that ‘Māori and indigenous researchers have a unique and important contribution to the field of oral history’, and that oral history offers ‘varying opportunities’ to Māori research. ‘Oral history’, she contends, may ‘assist’ in the way Māori ‘argue for individual agency, subvert collective constructions and understand collective

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rock'n'roll approach to oral history that ignores important analytical and ethical obligations. This, however, requires a deeper appreciation of oral sources in Aotearoa as far more complex than life narrative recordings. Likewise, oral history methods in New Zealand are much more diverse than a narrow focus on interview training, and can be experienced, recorded, and undertaken, in wānanga and other living contexts. Rethinking the form, practice and politics of public oral history, then, applies to New Zealand history generally. As long as oral history remains merely a mode of collecting New Zealand voices and testimonies, it does little to disrupt the march of colonisation. However, if oral history is conceived more broadly, there is potential to radically reframe the way New Zealand imagines its 'public'. Just as there is no New Zealand history without Māori, there is also no public oral history without the significant inclusion of native voices. Recognising and including indigenous articulations thus requires a cognizance of how Māori are not just an addition, or sideshow, but are key stakeholders, founders, and ongoing practitioners, of a distinctive, historically deep, and culturally rich public oral history in New Zealand.

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memory.' Rangimarie Mahuika, 'The Value of Oral History in a Kaupapa Māori Framework', *Te Pouhere Kōrero 3, Māori History, Māori Peoples*, (2009), p. 100.